

"Next to voting, filling out the census is your most valuable civic duty"

The Columbus Republic ran the following front page story today regarding the U.S. Census and the need for citizens to complete and return it:



[Why it's important to return your census form](#)

BY PAUL MINNIS

Columbus struck gold in 2000 when the last U.S. Census proved the city's population had grown enough to earn recognition as an entitlement city. Since then, the federal government has given city government about \$265,000 a year in federal block grant money for projects such as sidewalk repair and home rehabilitation.

Fast forward 10 years.

If the city loses population in the 2010 census, the entitlement designation could go away - along with the block grant.

U.S. Census Bureau estimates each Hoosier is worth \$1,500 in overall federal funds. For every person who does not respond to the census, the state redistributes the money tied to that person to other communities.

"If the (block grant) money doesn't go to us, it will go someplace else," said Jim Clouse, project director for Columbus Community Development.

Officials are urging people to fill out and return (preferably by mail) this year's census form, which is the shortest in U.S. history.

As of Wednesday, 24 percent of all forms distributed in Bartholomew County had been mailed back to the U.S. Census Bureau, according to the bureau Web site.

The response affects everything from Medicaid to foster care, from gaming revenue to cigarette tax distributions and from road-mile funding to the number of congressmen Indiana gets in the House of Representatives.

"Next to voting, filling out the census is your most valuable civic duty," said U.S. Rep. Mike Pence, R-Ind.

Even the local library, hospital and school system get funding based on the census count.

The private sector also uses the information. For example, businesses can use the information to decide where to build or expand.

Sandra Appler, the Indiana Census office's senior government partnership specialist, said 78 percent of Bartholomew County residents and 78 percent of Columbus residents participated in the census in 2000.

That's better than the 76 percent state average and 72 percent national average, but inevitably lower than the 100 percent participation officials want.

Also, the government loses an average of \$80 in taxpayer money for every person who fails to mail back his form and forces census workers to visit.

Appler said the census is required by federal law to visit each residence up to six times, if necessary.

Even then, there can be no guarantee the effort will succeed.

"If you want everything you and your community have coming, mail back the form," she said.

Responding to the census is the law. Appler said the only penalty to not responding is to the community, which misses out on untold sums of money and congressional representation.

Debbie Thomas, a member of the local census committee and director of the local English as a Second Language program, said Hispanics were undercounted in 2000, which is a serious problem considering that the Hispanic population is rising.

Undercounting deprives the group of grant money for ESL programs.

She said Hispanics should rest assured the census is for the collection of demographic data only. She said undocumented residents do not face any added risk of deportation or arrest.

Full census counts are vital to small communities such as Clifford, where a population of 250 residents can generate only so much in property taxes.

Ed Stone, the town's volunteer fire chief, said the fire station alone sometimes needs equipment and vehicles that can cost thousands of dollars.

He said fish fries usually cannot generate enough money to support those purchases.

Bob Pitman, director of Senior Center Services, said some of the center's funding depends on the census.

He said adult day care is supported by federal funding, and census results help the organization target resources to the people and areas that need it.

"The census is a portrait of how we've grown and where we are growing," Appler said. "There's just no reason not to do it."

Mail it back

Census officials asked that residents who received a census form complete it and mail it back (postage free) in the provided envelope by April 1.

After that, census takers will follow up door-to-door, up to six times, if necessary, with residents who did not respond.

The door-to-door process costs about \$80 a person, according to the Census Bureau.

Short census

This year's census is the shortest in U.S. history, consisting of 10 questions per person who lives in the household. Questions include: How many people live or stay in the house, apartment or mobile home? What age and sex are the residents? What are the residents'

racess? Is anyone of Hispanic origin? Census officials guarantee answers will be used for demographic information only.